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THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2017

Fire marshal's office has  
completed its site  
investigation of  
fatal fire.

Page 2.

Police clock driver  
going 131 km/h in a  
posted 80 km/h zone.

Page 7.

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## Holiday cheer



MICHELLE ALLENBERG/  
WELLAND TRIBUNE

Marilyn Corey, 74, and Joe Stenberg, 56, enjoy the company of fellow Port Colborne community members during a free Christmas dinner at Port Colborne High School on Christmas Day.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Report on fatal fire could take months

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

The Fire Marshal's Office (OFM) has completed its site investigation after a fatal fire in Port Colborne, but it could be months before the community learns the outcome of that probe.

After searching through the charred ruins of 53 Nickel St. for more than a week, where a Dec. 14 fire claimed the lives of four people, Port Colborne's deputy fire chief, Mike Bendia, said the OFM has completed the on-site investigation.

Some of the debris, however, was removed from the fire scene to be analyzed by an engineer, and OFM investigators are currently waiting for the results of that analysis before completing the final report on the fire.

But it could take as long as six months before the OFM report is released.

"I've seen (OFM reports) back in a month, I've seen them back in six months," Bendia said.

And OFM has had "a very busy December, unfortunately," he said.

"There were a lot of fire fatalities in December. All I can say is, we'll just have to wait until we get their findings."

In addition to the cause of the fire, Bendia said the OFM report will determine if smoke alarms were working in the home, and if any criminal charges are warranted.

Meanwhile, he said the building has been turned over to the property owner's insurance company, which is likely conducting an investigation of



FILE PHOTO

The charred ruins of 53 Nickel St.

its own.

"The building (owner) has been ordered to make sure that it's safe, so no one can get hurt in there, but right now it's in the hands of the insurance

company," Bendia said.

He said a fence was recently erected around the property, keeping people from entering the area.

Once the insurance compa-

ny's investigation is complete, he said the city's building department will require that the property be cleaned up.

The fire, which started at about 1:30 a.m. on Dec. 14,

claimed the lives of two-year-old Joshua Zuvic, his sister Samantha Zuvic, 15, their mother Tammy Burd, 37, and Burd's grandmother Eva Burd, 83. Tammy Burd's husband,

Joe Zuvic, 37, escaped the blaze, as did an uncle, Gary Burd.

ABenner@postmedia.com  
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**POSTMEDIA**

## Plan ahead and don't drink and drive

The holiday season is a celebration of consumption, never more so than as we approach New Year's Eve.

Some of the seasonal treats taste like peppermint or are covered in chocolate — but that's not the type of stuff we need to worry about going through our systems as we attend various functions and parties this time of year.

Not that there's anything wrong with tipping an adult beverage back with your friends, family and favourite

co-workers for a few more days. Just make sure you do it wisely.

When you enjoy some libations locally, best do it at a location within walking distance from where you plan to rest your head at the end of the night, or have a designated driver.

If you're depending on a local taxi, especially on New Year's Eve, then you're either very new to the area or have never experienced the horrific reality that this service is virtually non-

existent when it is needed the most.

They are readily available on a Wednesday afternoon for your grandma's weekly trip to the supermarket, and that's great.

What about the group of childhood friends who only get together as one unit once a year at Christmas or New Year's Eve?

The ones who have careers, families and everything going for them and always play it safe by calling a cab when celebrating

in the respective cities they moved to — it's a lot different than what they're used to.

Spending a few days in some of Niagara's smaller municipalities, such as Niagara-on-the-Lake or Fort Erie, can put everything at risk. You may find yourself standing outside in sub-zero temperatures, trying to figure out how to get home after an entertaining evening out. It's already 2:30 a.m. and the taxi dispatcher says all their cars

are busy and it will be at least a three-hour wait.

Meanwhile, you see your own vehicle parked 50 feet away and know you can make it to your destination a few blocks over.

Aside from all the horrific tragedies where innocent people lose their lives to drunk driving, including possibly your own, there are other ways it can ruin lives, too, without any physical injury involved.

This occurs when someone decides to take the risk

of driving home because getting a cab, which seems like such a simple task, has become impossible during this festive season.

So, for the remainder on the holidays, be prepared to sleep on a couch, have a designated driver lined up, stay home, or visit a local watering hole in your neighbourhood. Drinking and driving means risking a life, or a future, and it's not worth it.

— Special to Postmedia Network

## Fentanyl crisis demands bold shift in treating drug addiction

LARRY CAMPBELL  
Special to Postmedia Network

It is time to face reality. We must actively seek new solutions to address the fentanyl crisis and be more proactive on an emergent basis.

The existing strategies to treat the disease called drug addiction are not working — more than 800 people will die in B.C. this year.

We expect this number to continue to grow as more and varied compounds are introduced both domestically and from overseas.

Think of the steps that were implemented immediately to prevent and treat SARS and the Zika virus.

And yet we refuse to move quickly and decisively on what is described in B.C. as a public health emergency.

Why has this not been declared a public health emergency in the rest of Canada?

Last week, the federal government introduced Bill C-37. This will undo the draconian measures of the previous government, which were based on fear, not science.

Within this bill are measures to allow for borders agents to open letter mail that is suspected of contain-



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fentanyl, a drug 100 times stronger than morphine, is now being found on streets.

ing powder and a ban on pill presses used to manufacture fake opiate pills.

All of these measures certainly will assist in keeping fentanyl and other opiates from coming into the country.

But we need to be more proactive on an emergent basis.

Drugs will continue to enter and be made in this country.

Even if we could stop fentanyl, there will always be other drugs manufactured and sold

on the street. We need to treat the disease of drug addiction rather than continuing to depend on interdiction and law enforcement.

All levels of government need to support prescription

opiate replacement therapy like buprenorphine, methadone, and stronger drugs like hydro-morphone (dilaudid) and diacetylmorphine (heroin). Replacement therapies treat withdrawal symptoms with

opiates that are pharmaceutical and not manufactured.

We know that supervised injection sites work to prevent death and address the issues relating to public disorder — we should also be offering opiate-replacement therapy through supervised injection sites.

People suffering from addictions should be seen by a doctor. The doctor can then make decisions on what therapy would work best. Prescriptions would be issued that can only be filled at a supervised injection site or other similar medical facility. The medicine would be administered at the site, with no drugs leaving.

We as citizens must hold our politicians to account.

Do we have to wait until this public health emergency reaches Ontario and Quebec before the federal government reacts? How many more people have to die? How many families need to suffer?

Rise up. Demand action. The next person who dies a preventable death may be your family member or friend.

— Larry Campbell is a Canadian senator and former mayor of Vancouver.

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For further information, contact Greg Rumminger.

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# Slushy start to day includes upside down vehicle

JOHN LAW  
Postmedia Network

Police and emergency vehicles dealt with a slippery Niagara last Thursday morning, but not an overwhelming one.

While roads were slushy to start the day, CAA Niagara said staff weren't overly busy responding to roadside assistance calls.

"It's been normal, really, it's been a light morning," said Bill Willard, vice-president of automotive service. "We didn't have the temperatures that turned into ice."

While there was a "flurry of calls" between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., Willard said things had "calmed right down" by 10 a.m. Many of the calls involved vehicles needing tows after hitting curbs.

"That's the common thing when you get the slush and ice."

"Thick snow in the morning was accompanied by temperatures in the 1°C to 3°C range. Had it dropped below

the freezing point, the morning drive would have been much more hazardous.

"It would have been a different story if that temperature had dove down, for sure."

It's uncertain whether slick roads contributed to an early morning collision in Niagara Falls that left a vehicle upside down in a shopping plaza.

Niagara Regional Police said a vehicle left the road near the corner of McLeod and Kalar roads in Niagara Falls at about 4:30 a.m. It struck a pole and some signs, then flipped over at Pine-wood Plaza.

The vehicle sustained "extensive" damage, said Sgt. Nilan Dave. The driver was uninjured, but charged with careless driving.

Dave said Thursday morning crashes weren't "off the charts," with drivers taking precautions on the slick roads.

"It's not out of control."



JOHN LAW/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara drivers faced slick roads Thursday morning, but police and CAA Niagara say their call volumes were normal.



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# Boxer remembered after body found

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

Boxing was everything to Dominic (Mimi) Mercuri.

The 51-year-old Welland resident reached the provincial pinnacle of the sport in the early 1990s, claiming the Ontario championship in the featherweight category "multiple times," said Ray Napper, a coach at Napper's Boxing Club where Mercuri trained throughout his long career.

"He had a lot of expe-

rience, and he was a very slick fighter," Napper said. "He had well over 100 fights and you don't get that far without being good."

Long after his own tenure in the ring had ended, Mercuri continued to spend much of his time at the boxing club in Welland that was "his second home," coaching other fighters.

"Ever since 1995, he helped coach at the boxing club off and on," Napper said, adding Mercuri had recently talked about

returning to the club as a coach in the coming year.

Napper was at the boxing club Tuesday when he learned Mercuri had died.

Mercuri's body was found Tuesday in the icy waters of the Welland Recreational Canal by the Lincoln Street bridge.

"The coaches and myself and all stayed behind after practice and we all shared memories about him," Napper said. "He was a huge part of the boxing club, and help-

ing kids out."

Years ago, when Napper was a competitive boxer, it was Mercuri who helped him reach the national championship level of the sport.

"Mimi really helped me out when I was fighting, and I formed with him that bond with him that just carried over," Napper said.

More recently, Mercuri helped Napper train other young boxers, including one athlete who went on to reach the national championships.

Mercuri's love for the sport was contagious.

"He brought energy and enthusiasm" to the boxing



DOMINIC MIMI  
MERCURI

club, Napper said.

"Everybody wanted to work with Mimi because he was a fun guy to be around in the gym, and his passion for boxing is just unbelievable and teaching it in a fun way," he said. "That's why it's such a big loss, especially for the people who don't know him as well."

Mercuri had met trouble with the law in recent years, including a standoff with police on West Main Street about a decade ago. But he was also known as a kind and caring person to his numerous friends from throughout the province.

"People from all over Ontario are messaging me, sending condolences about Mimi," Napper said.

Although a funeral service for Mercuri is taking place today, friends at the boxing club are planning to remember him on his birthday next Thursday.

"I don't think we're going to do a huge thing for him, but we're going to do a moment of silence for him."

Niagara Regional Police confirmed Thursday that the body found earlier this week in the recreational canal was Mercuri. A post-mortem examination conducted Wednesday determined the cause of his death was not suspicious in nature.

Mercuri was reported to have been in Welland hospital for a medical issue about a week before he died.

Police are asking anyone with information about Mercuri's whereabouts in the days leading up to his death to contact Welland detectives at 905-688-4111 ext. 3355, to assist investigators in developing a timeline of his final days.

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## Second stunting charge laid against driver within weeks

A Lowbanks resident has been hit with his second stunting charge in as many months for driving at excessive speeds.

On Tuesday the Niagara Regional Police traffic enforcement unit conducted a speed measuring

exercise on Feeder Road in Wainfleet. Police stopped a vehicle operated by a driver who was subsequently charged with stunt driving — with a clocked speed of 131 km/h in a posted 80-km/h zone.

The driver has a lengthy record of Highway Traffic Act speeding offences, including a charge of stunting this past November, police said in a news release.

The driver — who police are not

identifying — will now face provincial sanctions which include a mandatory seven-day vehicle impoundment, administrative driver's licence suspension and a monetary fine of up to \$10,000.



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DOR TONYCZAK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

The foundation for Family and Children's Services Niagara is organizing a financial drive to raise money for totes to be used by children who are entering the foster care system. Shown are Virginia Workman, Denise Collins, Tracy Nickle and Meghan Coopman.

## Totes to aid foster kids during difficult move

MARVIANNE FIRTH  
Postmedia Network

For Virginia Workman, it was a difficult thought to process.

The St. Catharines family law lawyer couldn't bear to think about children entering the foster care system and stuffing their possessions, the only remnants of home, into a trash bag for the move.

It's a sad but common occurrence for youths taken into the care of Family and Children's Services Niagara.

At least, until now. Workman has launched Totes for Kids, an initiative that raises funds to provide junior hockey bags to children in hopes of increasing their sense of dignity during such a difficult time.

The program, embraced by the FACS Foundation, works in partnership with Canadian Tire, which has agreed to sell bags to the organization at cost.

Three St. Catharines Canadian Tire stores — on Welland Avenue, Glenade Avenue and Louisa Street — have come together to donate the first 100 bags to the cause.

Workman was inspired by the story of a Vancouver woman, a former foster child, who began collecting gently-used suitcases for the same purpose on the West Coast.

"She talked about how difficult it was to move from place to place and basically have only a garbage bag for your belongings. She spoke about how demoralizing it was, how demeaning," Workman recalled. "It was really touched by that."

In her profession, Workman often acts on behalf of children in protection instances. Their concerns often revolve around their belongings, the only constant in a flurry of life changes.

"That's at least something that's theirs. Their touchstones, their clothing, their toys," she said. "They've been removed from everything else they know."

After learning FACS had no bags

available for children to pack their lives up in when entering care, Workman decided to do something about it.

After speaking with the organization and hearing concerns about storage should used suitcases be collected, she approached Canadian Tire about coming on board with a model that would see new bags purchased at cost.

This fall she began working with Graham Keene from the Welland Avenue store and the pair found a bag that in bulk could easily be stored.

Workman also began soliciting donations from the community for the cause and has since raised \$11,000.

She's hopeful the program will eventually raise enough funds to become self-sustaining, so it does not take away from other FACS Foundation initiatives.

At any given time, FACS provides foster care for nearly 500 children.

Having only a trash bag to carry their belongings in "sends the wrong message to kids when they're faced with a real difficult time," said child protection supervisor Michelle Bernard.

The initiative is a "powerful gesture," she said, one that tells children they're both valued and cared for.

Bernard called the FACS Foundation fortunate to have many programs, including summer camps, toy drives and post-secondary school bursaries, that are supported by the community.

"This is another program that says to our kids as a community, 'We're rallying behind you. We're working together to provide you with things that you may need during your journey and during your involvement with FACS Niagara.'"

The organization has already begun handing out the 100 donated bags.

They've been divided between the St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls branch offices and

are available to all child protection workers.

Keene hopes the initiative helps to ease what can often be a traumatic experience for children.

"We may not be able to change the world, but we want to give them a little bit of pride so they're not going from home to home with their worldly belongings in a garbage bag," the store owner said. "I know it seems like a small thing, but there's greater significance than it just being a bag."

The intention is to create a long-term relationship between Canadian Tire and the program to ensure its success in the future, Keene said.

"There are ways we can extend this program. I think this could go even bigger."

The possibility to add toiletries to the bags exists through the current partnership and could be supported by other area businesses, he said.

Workman is also hopeful to see toiletries included in the future and is looking for partners willing to support that additional piece.

She ultimately wants to see Totes for Kids grow to reach other children's aid organizations across Ontario.

Workman got emotional as she spoke about what it means to her to help children facing such difficult circumstances.

"I don't know if I can put that into words," she said, taking a pause to reflect.

"It's not a huge project, but it just feels really important."

She credits her husband Doug Youmans and daughter Arwyn Youmans-Youmans for their assistance in getting the initiative off the ground.

"It's sort of been a family affair," she said, adding each has done their part to show support.

Donations for Totes for Kids can be made by calling the FACS Foundation at 905-937-7731.

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